DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 063 CG 013 132

AUTHOR Reis, Harry T.
TITLE Self-Presentations of Just Social Exchange.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, CANADA, August, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Theories; *Individual Psychology; *Justice; Literature Reviews; Personality; *Prosocial Behavior; *Psychological Characteristics; Rewards; Self Concept; *Social Exchange Theory; Social Psychology; Values

ABSTRACT

A self-presentational framework for understanding how people define a just exchange and why behaving justly is important to them is proposed. A case is posited for two self-presentational principles of justice -- that one is responsive to the perceived beliefs of significant others in determining what is just; and that one usually comes to believe that his view is the fair one. These tenets should be equally applicable to a self-presentational analysis of any significant ego-involving social behavior. Current research which is compatible with this view is discussed. The dramaturgical approach to impression management presented stresses a contract among interactants to maintain particular definitions of situations and role relationships to give meaning and order to social interaction. Thus, self-presentation becomes a dynamic conception of people structuring their relations a propos to their life-space, rather than a theory of how to win friends and influence people. (Author/JLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED165063

Self-Presentations of Just Social Exchange

Harry T. Reis

University of Rochester

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H T Reis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Paper presented at a symposium on the Meaning of Self Presentation in Social Interaction at the 86th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August, 1978.

CG013132

Self-Presentations of Just Social Exchange

The idea that people might try to manage impressions of their fairness has been with us for years and years. Lawyers, con artists, negotiators, suitors, politicians, ingratiators, and recent American Presidents have shared a preoccupation with presenting themselves as either scrupulously just, or as victims of rank injustice. Their behavior, in distorting assessments of inputs, outcomes and intentions, is readily understood by most observers, and embraced by students of public relations. By juggling impressions of their position, they seek to capitalize on other people's responsiveness to equity norms, and thereby enhance their own profits. Yet the ease of documenting such intentional manipulation masks the subtler meanings of self-presentation, meanings which give richness to theories such as those of Goffman and Mead, and which define social interaction in terms of contexts, scripts, and relationships among participants. The former case has received more attention within social psychology; naturally, I would like to talk about the latter today. In particular, I would like to propose a self-presentational framework for understanding how people define a just exchange and why behaving justly is important to them.

The debate over whether people attend to the Pied Piper of consistency with internal standards or of managing impressions for others has been enacted in numerous content areas of social psychology - conformity, dissonance, anticipatory attitude change, intrinsic motivation, and reactance, to name but a few. Yet the distinction would seem to have a ready home in theories of social exchange, since they are concerned with the distribution of outcomes, the very commodities which a successful performance would increase.

It is therefore particularly revealing to examine the operation of self-presentational processes within exchange situations. Obviously, it is to the advantage of individuals to maintain the appearance of behaving fairly, while at the same time stretching input/outcome ratios as far as this constraint permits. To borrow a phrase from Glen Hass, 'impression management within limits' allows one to satisfy the two principal propositions of equity theory posed by Walster, Berscheid and Walster (1973): maximizing individual outcomes, and reaping the rewards (or avoiding the costs) which groups provide for those who act equitably. The social nature of this sanctioning process suggests a number of preconditions for determining when people are most likely to comply with prevailing standards of equity, at least within the impression management conceptualization: when behavior occurs publicly, when observing others are perceived as able and willing to alter one's outcomes, and when these observers are a significant source of approval or reward for the actor.

Each of these proposals has received at least indirect empirical support, but it is the public/private variation on which I would like to comment, since it has been used most frequently to substantiate impression management interpretations of equitable behavior. In one experiment, performed collaboratively with Stan Morse and Ken Gergen, subjects were hired to perform some computer check-coding. When they arrived at the work room, a handwritten note informed them that the experimenter had been called away unexpectedly, but that they should do the check-coding anyway. Their pay was left on a table along with the letter. One group of subjects (Communication condition) was asked to leave a note indicating how much work they had done; a second group merely was to add their work to a large pile already

completed, making it seem impossible to tell how much they had done (No Communication condition). The control group consisted of subjects fulfilling the same task while the experimenter supervised. There were no differences at all between the Supervised and Communication conditions; subjects in both groups spent more time in the room and finished more coding with fewer errors than subjects in the No Communication condition (see Table 1). Most simply, we took this to imply that subjects were concerned with behaving equitably only if someone else knew they had. When no one else was aware if they had realized their end of the contract, an equitable amount of work was unnecessary, undesirable, or perhaps even "sucker's money." Apparently, when the rewards of a judicious self-presentation were available, social approval was a sufficiently potent motive to induce more work.

That these subjects' actions can be taken as evidence for judicious self-presentation was further corroborated in Joan Gruzen's dissertation. There are of course many different modes of redressing inequity. Gruzen reasoned that if in fact communicating one's compliance with equity rules is the goal of equity restoration, then the particular strategy chosen should be whichever is most visible to the target. This is exactly what her research found (see Table 2). When overpaid subjects expected to give both their work output and task evaluations to the experimenter who had overpaid them, they characterized it as more difficult tiring, effortful, etc. - or in other words, precisely the portrayal which would justify their higher pay and maintain the appearance of thorough deservingness. When their task ratings were to be confidential, however, differential evaluations would not restore equity in the experimenter's eyes. Therefore, an alternative means was required, which consisted of the more costly expenditure of

effort into producing higher quality work. This study demonstrates that equity restoration will occur in whatever manner is most apparent to the person liable for their pay (although in an interesting sidelight, the same results emerged when the experimenter's responsibility entailed no more than selecting a random level of pay out of a hat. Intentionality seems not to be part of the contract).

Thus it appeared that social approval-seeking for living up to an equity norm was a more viable explanation of the many experiments documenting inequity reduction than its traditional counterpart, consistency with internal standards. A third experiment, however, intimated that although this might well be true, the issues surrounding people's personal experience of their response to inequity and injustice might be decidedly more intricate. This study was originally conceived with somewhat different purposes in mind. All of our research, as well as that of other investigators, had dealt with people's reaction to an inequity initiated by someone else. Since the level of exchange has been imposed by others, it stands to reason that recipients will be concerned with exhibiting the fairness of their reply. It is as if subject's were being asked to answer to a contract offering one or another quantity of compensation. But what of their own decision-making? Would subjects account for the standards of others when responsible for creating reward allocations?

In this experiment, subjects were randomly selected to serve as reward allocators whose task was to distribute a group payment among themselves and three co-workers. The situation was staged in such a manner as to make the allocator's divisions either known or private from

his co-workers, and from the experimenter. In this way, we could determine whether subjects would account for the anticipated responses of salient others in weighing and resolving the various alternatives. Of course, the subject's right to opt for any solution he saw fit was emphasized both procedurally and in the verbal instructions, so that any pressures subjects experienced would be purely self-presentational - there would be no future interaction, and no opportunity for even expressing grievances. Now, one further conceptual leap is required to understand the implications of this study. As numerous theorists, such as Sampson (1969) and Deutsch (1975), have suggested, the typical consequences of any form of interrelatedness tend to elicit that type of relationship, and vice versa. That is, a reward allocation will reflect the preferred form of interdependence, since distributive schemes define the status orientations and relationships among individuals. In our experimental situation, there were at least three relevant models of interdependence, and hence three appropriates schemes for distributive justice. The relationship between experimenter and subject-workers was essentially an economic one, defined in terms of the exchange of units of goods for units of money. As such, the salient norm was equity, since it characterized the nature of the partners' positions with each other. On the other hand, the four co-workers were constituted as a team working toward a common goal, which was to be shared among members. Founded on a bed of "we-feeling" and status congruence, a promotively interdependent group will stress equality norms, in which outcomes are apportioned equally, irrespective of any specific inputs other than group membership per se. Finally, the subjectwas concerned with his own self-interest, on which I will have more to say later.

Thus we have an experimental paradigm in which the subject's assignment is to resolve the conflicting patterns of equity, equality, and self-interest into an ultimate choice. A self-presentational analysis would propose that to the extent that others are to be aware of how the subject has divided the group payment and are therefore salient as a source of social approval, reward allocations will reflect their perceived definition of the situation. This is exactly what we found (see Table 3). When the experimenter was not aware of the subject's allocations, there were no rewards to be gained from him for adherence to an equity norm, nor costs to be incurred for not conforming. Equity carried relatively less weight under these circumstances, and equality was more likely. Similarly, when the experimenter was to be informed but one's co-workers were not, equity bore greater salience and equality less. When neither experimenter nor co-worker were to be aware of allocations, in other words when subjects' choices were completely private, both equity and equality were less important and subjects opted for somewhat larger shares for themselves. To summarize, we have evidence here of subjects incorporating the expected, perceived standards of aware others in deciding how a group payment is to be distributed.

But this study also provides evidence of the complexity and subtlety of self-presentational phenomena. There are some theorists who would limit the applicability of impression management concepts to deliberate social engineering, such as the kind practiced by politicians, interviewees, and travelling salespeople. It seems to me that the dramaturgical perspective has a good deal more to offer. For one thing, whatever social approval these latter subjects were pursuing, it could not be accumulated

as a credit entitling material rewards, as all subjects were strangers anticipating no further interaction with each other. Second, although subjects did choose larger shares for themselves in private, their self-interest was clearly restrained, averaging only 20c more out of $5.00 than in the public conditions. Apparently, pocketing more than a minimally expanded fair share would have generated sufficiently discomforting cognitions about themselves - i.e., guilt - to outweigh the material gains to be had. Finally, it is interesting that subjects incorporated the perceived expectations of others into a decision they initiated and controlled. Perhaps their role as procedural agent for the group highlighted this responsibility; nonetheless they acceded more readily in public. What these points implicate is the highly personal relevance of social self-presentations - they are more than simply a means of earning the esteem of others; they represent a method of selecting a position within a social network, one that is important to the self, and then securing it. As Goffman has said, one "plays with his condition in order to realize it" (Goffman, 1959, p. 76). No where is this view clearer than in examining self-presentations of justice and fairness, and I would like to turn now to discussing these more thoroughly.

The process of presenting oneself as a just, fair individual comprises two predominant elements. The first, as I have already argued for, stipulates that people strive to reach a common definition of an interaction with significant others by integrating their perceived beliefs with one's own. However, it is equally important to sustain the impression in one's own mind that the enacted behavior has in fact been justifiable. In the reward

allocation study previously described, subjects were also asked to evaluate each co-worker's ability and effort. Interestingly, their judgments corresponded to the pay they had assigned, so it would seem that everyone deserved what he got, and got what he deserved. Since these ratings were to be entirely confidential, they cannot be construed as self-presentations, except to the self. The personal sensation of having acted justly, rewarding in and of itself, is realized by a relatively straight forward process of dissonance reduction. Having acted in some manner X, the bolstering cognition that X was in fact the fairest resolution of the existing priorities and circumstances restores belief that one is in fact a fair, right-minded individual entitled to the just desserts which, according to our Western socialization, such people merit.

One of the keys to this analysis is, of course, the belief in a just world. There would seem to be little personal value in behaving fairly if one did not believe that justice eventually "paid off" in some way. However, once one accepts the premise that good things happen to just people, it becomes important to see one's own actions as fair, even of course if this is a post hoc rationalization (i.e., justification). In some impression management conceptualizations, it is sufficient to identify behavior which creates the appearance of justice in the eyes of significant others, significant at least in the sense that they control meaningful rewards and sanctions. The additional element of believing these actions to be just adds a new direction of "self-presentation to self" to this framework. Obviously, people are significant sources of rewards and sanctions for themselves. Thus we have a two-barreled approach. People include notions about the perceived principles of others in arriving at distributive decisions, both for approval-seeking and information-seeking reasons (that is, in the symbolic interactionist manner of seeing one's

behavior through the eyes of others.) They simultaneously strive to affirm their self-perceptions of fairness.

The personal significance of seeing oneself as just was borne out in a recent experiment conducted along with Laurie Burns. In this study, we sought a manipulation which would make the restoration of equity more personally important for subjects, our reasoning being that if it is intrapsychically valuable to eliminate any visible inequities, then strengthening this need should increase the equity-restoring behavior shown. Duval and Wicklund's concept of objective self-awareness afforded such a test. They propose that self-focused attention makes the discrepancy between actions and internal standards more salient, and, if this gap is negative, motivates behavior to either diminish the difference or avoid it through distraction. If overpayment is truly discomforting for the self-concept, then in the presence of self-focusing stimuli, it should lead to greater attempts at restitution. This is exactly what we found (see Table 4). In a 2 x 2 design, subjects were either equitably or overpaid to perform a proofreading task in front of a blank wall or a mirror, one of the standard self-focusing tools used in OSA research. Overpaid- No OSA subjects showed a slight tendency to do less but better quality work than their equitably-paid controls. Overpaid-OSA subjects proofread significantly more material while making many more errors than their controls. Performing a greater quantity of work more poorly would seem to be evidence of more zealously attempting to produce greater output, commensurate with higher pay, regardless of whether we interpret this as a distraction or discrepancy-reduction strategy. The point is that calling attention to the deviation from personal standards of a fair payment exchange,

without increasing the salience of others as sources of social approval, is sufficiently potent to prompt heightened restitutive actions. In this way, the interval between actions and ideals is narrowed.

I think it is interesting to note that while others have discussed internalization of and compliance with rules of fairness as part of the process which engenders the less immediate rewards of group membership, none have specified these functions in self-presentational terms. Lerner, for example, has described the personal contract children gradually adopt, trading instant benefits for the longer-term, and more satisfying, gratifications of obtaining rewards through "earning" and "deservingness." Piaget and Kohlberg have also expressed similar notions, the latter most obviously in Conventional Stage morality. More recently, Rawls has presented a theory of justice in which individual adherence to the fundamental tenets of a society is also conceived as a contract. To quote:

> "Where a number of persons engage in a mutually cooperative venture according to rules, and thus restrict their liberty in ways necessary to yield advantages for all, those who have submitted to these restrictions have a right to a similar acquiescence on the part of those who have benefited from their submission" (Rawls, 1971, p. 112).

This of course is a belief, one which motivates people to seek the justice in their own behavior, whatever it may happen to be. Otherwise, they would not be entitled to the accrued rewards of social participation.

This rather simple idea may be used to explain the dilemma which arbitrators ranging from umpires, referrees, and judges to labor mediators, marriage counselors and grievance committees often face. That is that each side not only presents the merits of its case, but holds the arguments in its favor to be scrupulously fair. Although it is true that many times this

is merely a guise to bolster the sincerity of one's case, more often it is actually believed, sometimes in the face of rather incredulous evidence or logic. "I only want what's fair" is often heard. In other words, being treated fairly is important, and to anticipate this happening, given the nature of the social contracts we have been socialized with, one must perceive one's behavior as justified. More cynically, La Rochefoucauld once made the same point more eloquently: "The love of justice in most men is simply the fear of suffering injustice" (La Rochefoucauld, 1678).

It must be noted that this sense of justice meshes quite well with the dramaturgical points presented earlier. An effective sense of justice, to use Rawls's term, requires one to integrate public, generally accepted conceptions of what is fair. This is why reference groups, the approval of significant others, and the control of morality-instructing resources are all vital in shaping exchange concepts and actions. The contract underlying one's sense of justice emanates from the desire to establish a favorable interdependence with others. Incorporating their standards, even for approval-seeking motives, is akin to moving toward a common definition of an interaction. The great flexibility of acceptable standards highlights the exchange, or interactional, components of using information from others to achieve a firm, well-regulated relationship, chosen from among the range of personally-valid alternatives. These definitions of how power, status, rewards and costs are to be distributed generate scripts, as Abelson has termed them, for the dyadic relationship, and of course, for one's individual part in it. Scripts, or anticipated sequences of events, are very much like dramaturigcal concepts, in that

the very roles and characterizations which initially define an interaction provide the structure for the course it takes. Thus, the sorts of self-presentations one advances set the tone for the sorts of interactions and relationships one has. By responding to the beliefs of others, one accepts the minimal procedural conditions of justice, and hence asserts oneself as a just person. The fundamental Aristotelian position which still guides most theories of justice in our world posits that participating in a just society is rewarding in and of itself. Self-presentations of fair social exchange, both to the self and to others, are therefore inherently valuable, for in furnishing a structure for social interaction, they provide a means for obtaining the greatest rewards.

To conclude, I have tried to pose a case for two self-presentational principles of justice: first, that we are responsive to the perceived beliefs of significant others in determining what is just; and second, that we usually come to believe that our view is the fair one. These tenets should be equally applicable to a self-presentational analysis of any other signficant ego-involving social behavior, and indeed, research is now being conducted by many investigators which is compatible with this view; for example, in the work of Bem, Deaux, Ickes, Kidder and others on sex-role self-presentations. The dramaturgical approach to impression management stresses the contract among interactants to maintain particular definitions of situations and role relationships to give meaning and order to everyday social interaction. Viewed in this way, self-presentation becomes a dynamic conception of people structuring their relations with their life-space, rather than a theory of how to win friends and influence people.

References

Deutsch, M. Equity,equality and need: What determines which value will be used as the basis of distributive justice? Journal of Social Issues, 1975, 31, 137-149.

Goffman, E. The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959.

Lerner, M. J., Miller, D. T., and Holmes, J. G. Deserving and the emergence of forms of justice. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) Advances in experimental social psychology, vol. 9. New York: Academic Press, 1976.

Morse, S. J., Gruzen, J., and Reis, H. T. The nature of equity-restoration: Some approval-seeking considerations. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1976, 12, 1-8.

Rawls, J. A theory of justice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Reis, H. T. and Gruzen, J. On mediating equity, equality and self-interest: The role of self-presentation in social exchange. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1976, 12, 487-503.

Sampson, E. E. Studies of status congruence. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) Advances in experimental social psychology, vol. 4. New York: Academic Press, 1969.

Walster, E., Berscheid, E., and Walster, G. W. New directions in equity research. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1973, 25, 151-176.

Table 1

Work Indices as a Function of Communication and Supervision

	Communication Condition		
	No Communication	Communication	Supervised
Time Spent in Room	24.47	37.75	32.50
Number of Lines Checked	10.68	15.90	15.13
Number of Errors Found	27.63	37.55	38.67
Percent of Errors Found	93.42	96.04	97.50

Table 2

Post-Task Ratings and Percentage of Errors Detected by Level of Payment and Experimenter Awareness

Experimenter Awareness	Level of Payment	
	Overpaid	Equitably paid
	Percentage of Errors Detected	
Aware	64.96	57.75
Unaware	74.21	64.33
	Post-task ratings*	
Aware	20.47 (+3.65)	15.09 (-1.29)
Unaware	16.64 (+ .41)	14.40 (-2.55)

*Scores represent mean ratings across nine 30-point semantic differential items. The higher the score, the more difficult the task was evaluated. Parenthetical values represent change from pre- to post-test ratings. A positive change score indicates the task was seen as more difficult following completion.

Table 3

Mean Shares Allocated to Each Partner*

Experimenter		Subjects: Aware	Subjects: Not Aware
Aware	C	1.41	1.57
	A	1.24	1.21
	D	1.09	0.98
	Self	1.27	1.25
	C-D	0.32	0.59
Not Aware	C	1.31	1.35
	A	1.22	1.15
	D	1.13	1.01
	Self	1.34	1.49
	C-D	0.18	0.34

*Scores are in dollars. C-D refers to the difference between the best (C) and worst (D) performers' shares.

Table 4

Quantity and Quality of Proofreading

	Level of Payment	
	Equitable	Overpaid
Self-Awareness	Number of Lines Read	
OSA	205.1	275.3
Not OSA	239.8	191.0
	Percentage of Errors Correctly Found	
OSA	64.1	55.1
Not OSA	60.0	65.1

Pay x OSA $\underline{F}s(1, 44) = 9.22$ for lines and $= 6.74$ for errors found, both $\underline{p} < .01$.